

The
Early French Press
in Manitoba

By Douglas C. McMurtrie
 pamphlet



CHICAGO • ILLINOIS

Privately Printed

MCMXXXII

Amphlet

1932

4-11-32

50¢ 50¢

Ex LIBRIS
UNIVERSITATIS
ALBERTAENSIS



RBT 7106

LIBRARY OF THE UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA



The Early French Press in Manitoba

Printing was introduced into Manitoba in 1841 by James Evans at the mission near Norway House, some three hundred miles north of Winnipeg, where religious works in the Cree language were printed for some years, and in 1859 W. Buckingham and W. Coldwell established *The Nor'Wester*, first newspaper in Manitoba and the northwest, at the Red River Settlement, now Winnipeg. Politics played an important part in the development of the Manitoba press, and the insurrection of 1869 led by Louis Riel, in opposition to the establishment of Manitoba as a province of Canada, was reflected in the activities of the Manitoba papers and caused the production of the earliest known Manitoba printing other than newspapers.¹

In 1871 the first French newspaper in Manitoba, *Le Métis*, was established at St. Boniface, across the river from Winnipeg. It immediately assumed a position of considerable importance in the province and throughout the northwestern country because of the high percentage of French-speaking whites and Indians in the northwest. Precise knowledge concerning *Le Métis* and the course of its four-year existence has previously been lack-

¹A detailed account of the effects of the 1869 rebellion on the press in Manitoba is given in Douglas C. McMurtrie's "The First Printing in Manitoba," Chicago, 1931 (reprinted from *Printing Review of Canada*, October, 1930).

ing, but by the aid of Mr. W. J. Healy, Provincial Librarian of Manitoba, a complete file of this almost forgotten publication, and additional details concerning its history, have been made available. Mr. Healy obtained his information through Roger Goulet, of St. Boniface, son of the pioneer Goulet who was intimately concerned with one of the most stirring events in the history of *Le Métis*. Files of this paper belonging to Mr. Goulet, and other files belonging to a neighbour of his named Larivière, who was actually connected with the office of *Le Métis*, have been carefully examined, and Mr. Larivière has contributed his personal recollections of the paper and its establishment.¹

According to information from Mr. Larivière,² the presses and equipment for *Le Métis* cost about \$500 and, as Manitoba was still inaccessible by rail in 1871, were brought by way of St. Cloud, Minnesota, then the end of the railway. From St. Cloud the equipment was transported by cart to Georgetown, on the Red River, and thence by boat to St. Boniface. The founder and first publisher of the paper was Joseph Royal.³

²A file of *Le Métis* is owned by Mr. Roger Goulet, of 235 Dumoulin Street, St. Boniface. A file formerly belonging to Mr. Larivière was given by him to Vicar-General Cloutier, of the archdiocese of St. Boniface, and is believed to be deposited now in the archbishop's palace at St. Boniface.

³Procured through Roger Goulet and transmitted to me in a letter from Mr. Healy in September, 1930.

⁴The name of the publisher does not appear on any of the early issues of the paper itself. I have found it only in J. P. Robertson's chapter on the Manitoba press in "A History of Canadian Journalism" (Toronto, 1908), p. 183, and in Aegidius Fauteux, "The Introduction of Printing into Canada" (Montreal, 1930), p. 171. Neither of these authorities gives any information as to Royal's origin or previous experience with printing.

The first issue of *Le Métis* was a "numero-prospectus" dated Saturday, May 27, 1871. This was only a half-sheet of about 9 by 14 inches, printed on both sides. It was issued from a printing office "in the house opposite the residence of Mr. Narcisse Marion, at St. Boniface." The subscription price for one year was "ten shillings sterling or two dollars and a half, Canadian money," payable in advance. It was printed entirely in French, and all extracts from it in this article, therefore, are given in translation. It appealed to the far-flung French-speaking population of the region, as is indicated in a notice "to merchants and business men" which appeared in the first two or three issues in the following terms:

"*Le Métis* is called, we think, to a large circulation, not only in the Province of Manitoba, but also in the United States, in Canada, and in all parts of the Northwest or Rupert's Land. . . . *Le Métis*, being the only French newspaper in this part of America, necessarily finds itself appealing almost exclusively to the French population which, as everyone knows, constitutes a notable portion of the inhabitants of this vast country. We shall publish the announcements of the courts of justice, those of the governments of Manitoba and of Ottawa, and in general all announcements which, emanating from authority, are of a general interest."

The first, or prospectus, issue also announced the future programme of the paper: "The journal which we establish to-day is destined to defend the good cause, and by the good cause we mean the one that is based on the eternal principles of right and of justice. Just as there is only one way to be right and just, so there is only one cause that may be called the good cause, and it is that one which we embrace. We want to work for

the reestablishment of order and authority in this young and vigorous Province of Manitoba, because we are convinced that this is the only means of profiting from the excellent principles set down in the constitution which rules us."

Advertisements of the "Librairie Catholique du *Métis*" and of the job printing office of the paper were prominently displayed on the second page of the single sheet which composed the first issue. An article in the text called attention to the advertisements: "We refer the reader to the announcements in which we solicit the patronage of the public for the print shop and book store of the *Métis*. Our printing office is as complete as possible, all things taken into consideration. Our types are of the best sort and have been chosen by experienced men; we have two presses capable of producing, together, from a thousand to twelve hundred sheets an hour; the public has, then, every guaranty of being served with promptitude and according to its needs. There will be regularly found at the *Métis* establishment a varied assortment of paper, envelopes, pens, religious books, sacred pictures, chaplets, boxes for chaplets, medals, crosses, tapestries, etc. The house occupied by our office is situated opposite the former dwelling of Mr. Kittson, to-day the property and residence of Mr. Narcisse Marion, at St. Boniface."

From the time of its founding in the spring of 1871 until the fall of 1872, *Le Métis* had a quiet existence. With the issue of April 10, 1872, it had moved across the river from St. Boniface to Winnipeg. But the September elections of 1872 precipitated difficulties that resulted in mob violence and the complete destruction of the *Métis* office and of its sister journal, the Winnipeg *Manitoban*.

The latter paper had been established two years earlier in the midst of the Riel uprising, which had upset all the printing offices of the province; its founders were William Coldwell, the pioneer newspaper publisher of Manitoba, and Robert Cunningham. The election riots began on Thursday afternoon, September 19, 1872, when a peaceable election was being held at the home of Roger Goulet, father of the Roger Goulet through whose aid files of *Le Métis* have been made available. A number of men, most of them said to have been recent arrivals from Ontario and not enfranchised Manitoban voters, crossed the river to St. Boniface in the afternoon and began to threaten trouble at the polling place. The federal election had been going heavily in favor of Donald A. Smith, who had received some eighty-five votes, while his opponent, Mr. Wilson, had received only one vote at St. Boniface. The rioters favored Wilson, and when they learned how the vote had been running they attempted to seize the poll books, which they succeeded in destroying in the ensuing fight.

The crowd then returned to Winnipeg, where the voting was going on at the police station. Here also Mr. Smith had a large majority, and fighting again broke out in an attempt to destroy the records, as had been done at St. Boniface. The police captain and some of his men were badly beaten as a result of incendiary speeches made to the mob. Towards evening the rioting broke out again, and it was reported that the mob intended to wreck the *Métis* office because of that journal's partiality for Smith. The report was discredited, but about seven o'clock fifty men banded together and attacked the *Manitoban* office, shattering the large windows in front, breaking open one of the doors, scattering

the type about the floor, upsetting the ink, and generally creating havoc. The mob then attacked the *Métis* plant, completely destroying the presses, type, and everything in the office, even to throwing some of the type out of the window. Not satisfied with the work already accomplished with the *Manitoban*, the crowd then hurried back there to complete the destruction of that office. Both Winnipeg and St. Boniface were in a state of chaos by this time, and reports were circulated that the mob intended to burn both the *Métis* and *Manitoban* offices. In the course of the night two or three attempts to set fire to the *Métis* building were actually made.⁵

Four days later *Le Métis* managed to issue a small extra, printed with the sad remnants of the materials of the *Manitoban* office. This small sheet was headed *Extra du Métis*, and dated "Winnipeg, 23 septembre, 1872." It began with the heading: "Federal Elections.—D. A. Smith elected, Selkirk, 194 vote majority. R. Cunningham elected, Marquette, 278 vote majority.—Dr. Schultz elected, Lisgar, 145 vote majority.—Scenes of violence in Selkirk.—Battle at St. Boniface.—Theft of the poll book. — Scenes at Winnipeg. — Offices of the *Métis* and *Manitoban* pillaged.—Attempt to burn the offices of the *Métis*.—Military force under arms.—Falsehood in the Liberal Extra."

This extra of *Le Métis* was concerned entirely with an account of the riot on the nineteenth: "Thanks to the

⁵A report of the election riots in Manitoba and of the destruction of the two newspaper offices was carried in the Toronto *Canadian Illustrated News* for October 19, 1872. The report of the riots was published on page 243, and pictures of the wreckage of the *Manitoban* printing office were given on page 252. The account in the *Canadian Illustrated News* is very similar to that given in the *Métis* extra of September 23, 1872, noted below.

obliging hospitality of Messrs. Coldwell & Cunningham, of the *Manitoban*, to whom there remains a handful of various types, we publish to-day an extra of the *Métis*, and advise our readers that the publication of our journal will be suspended for some time. Our two presses are broken; our cases are empty and in pieces; our types have been thrown in the street; our bookstore is sacked; and there remains in our offices not one piece intact. We have lost seven to eight thousand dollars at least in property destroyed and damaged. It is the French population that the organized mob of the *Liberal* wished to hit in sacking and destroying the offices of the only French journal founded to protect their interests, their rights and justice, and to publish what happens here . . . Poor Red River country, how the times have changed in three years!"

What happened during the day was told in detail, and then a description given of the mob's first attack on the *Métis* office: "These wild men forced the doors and commenced to sack everything. They overturned the imposing stones, breaking two forms of the *Métis* and of the *Manitoba Gazette*, upsetting the frames, scattering and mixing all the types, tearing the books, breaking the windows and the bookshop show-cases, and assailing our two presses, the Gordon and the Washington Hoe. Armed with the printer's chase of wrought iron, they hammered, broke, and mutilated everything and left only after having annihilated and ruined our printing establishment, the fruit of great sacrifices and valued at several thousands of dollars. During the plundering, the mob remained in front of the offices. flourishing revolvers and shouting 'Rule Britannia.' The wild men having forgotten to destroy the *Manitoban* presses, they re-

turned there: the losses of our associates are very considerable and of some thousands of dollars."

The *Extra* concluded with a statement by the publishers, J. B. Bourdeau & Cie., who had succeeded Joseph Royal, the founder: "Let our readers take courage; we have already written to order the types as well as the presses necessary for publishing the *Métis* as soon as possible." By Saturday, October 12, 1872, this order had been filled, and *Le Métis* was being published again, this time in the same building in which the *Manitoban* was printed.

On May 20, 1873, *Le Métis* moved back to St. Boniface. It was published there until its discontinuance by N. D. Gagnier, then the "editeur-propriétaire," on May 29, 1875. *Le Métis* was later succeeded by *Le Manitoba*.

McMurtrie, D.C. ~~4446544~~

319425

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

TO BE SHELVED ON PAMPHLET
SHELF IN CIRCULATION OFFICE

